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HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 A Jan. 31 poetry and music doubleheader in Putney

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2 Next Stage, Yellow Barn host a pair of events melding the
3 genres to create something new

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4 TEXT BODY:

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5 As Yellow Barn Executive Director Catherine Stephan
6 says, "we have a delightful embarrassment of riches" in Putney
7 on Saturday, Jan. 31 with two separate performances that
8 commingle poetry and musical performance.

9 At 2 p.m. that day, one can catch cellist Eugene Friesen
10 and poet Court Dorsey in their collaboration, "Poems with
11 Wings," at Next Stage.

12 As Dorsey describes it, the program will be “an
13 astonishing array of poems, from dark to light, from the absurd to
14 the sublime — socks, cats, the creation and destruction of the
15 world — all cradled in the loving arms of Eugene and his cello.”

16 Then, at 3 p.m., “Music & Poetry in Conversation” — the
17 culmination of a brief residency with an ensemble of Yellow Barn
18 alumni and Palestinian-American poet Naomi Shihab Nye —
19 takes place at Yellow Barn’s Big Barn.

20 According to a news release, the Yellow Barn program
21 will blend “moments of reflection with bursts of playfulness,” in a
22 collaboration that “seeks to reveal a new perspective on the
23 emotional core of each piece — musical and poetic — through
24 thoughtful juxtaposition.”

25 ‘Poems with Wings’

26 Dorsey, a poet-playwright-actor based in Wendell,
27 Massachusetts, “has written, acted in, or directed over 30
28 performance ensembles,” according to a news release.

29 Offering solo performances of his original songs, poems,
30 and short writings, he’s been a member of Pilgrim Theater
31 Collaborative; he’s co-created with Massachusetts performing
32 artists Jean-Claude van Itallie and Kermit Dunkelberg; and has
33 presented at New York City’s experimental performance venue, La
34 MaMa, among a wide range of credits and engagements.

35 Having appeared in film and in international activist
36 theater, he was a founding member of the folk cabaret ensemble
37 Bright Morning Star. There he toured with Pete Seeger and
38 Odetta.

39 Friesen of Walpole, New Hampshire, is a four-time
40 Grammy Award-winning concert and recording artist, a
41 composer, a conductor, and a professor at Boston’s Berklee
42 College of Music.

43 Having worked, toured, and/or recorded with Dave
44 Brubeck, Paul Winter, Paul Simon, Martin Sexton, Dar Williams,
45 and Will Ackerman, among others, Friesen’s “passion for

46 improvised music has been featured in concerts all over the
47 world" a news release says, including at Cathedral of St. John the
48 Divine in New York City, where he is an artist-in-residence.

49 Dorsey and Friesen first performed together in 2022 as
50 part of the Mohawk Trail Concert series in Massachusetts. A
51 reprise of sorts, Saturday's program will feature improvised cello
52 and poetry readings with a focus on Dorsey's writings.

53 About the integration of text and cello, Friesen says, "I
54 feel my whole artistic life has been influenced by working with
55 language."

56 Some 30 years ago, he was invited as part of the Paul
57 Winter Consort to attend the International Poetry Festival in New
58 Jersey, "a kind of encampment of poets from all over the world
59 [where] I had the chance to improvise along with Galway
60 Kinnell, Coleman Barks, Billy Collins, Robert Bly — people on
61 the main stage of poetry at that time."

62 "And I just found that my cello was responding to this
63 language in ways that were surprising to me," Friesen says.
64 "That's become a process of revelation for me artistically."

65 While poems of Billy Collins and Pablo Neruda will
66 pepper the lineup, the bulk of the poems Dorsey has chosen for
67 Saturday come from his collection, *Tiger Stripes: Poems of*
68 *Shadow and Light* (Human Error Publishing, 2024).

69 "It's a set of mystical poems," Dorsey explains. "One
70 we'll do, 'Exegesis,' is a kind of tongue-in-cheek look at what you
71 might call 'spiritual materialism.'"

72 He'll read a couple of sonnets, too, from a series based
73 on "mysteries that I came upon when I was in India many years
74 ago, and I've used throughout my life."

75 Some poems are older; others written in recent years, he
76 says.

77 Dorsey's poem "Light the Mechanical Man" "apologizes
78 for the human nature of one's own spirituality, finding itself
79 stumbling in the streets at midnight, kind of bumping into lamp
80 posts, etc.," he says. "So it's a little rangy."

81 He also plans to read one or two poems from a series he
82 wrote while working with a shaman in Tucson.

83 Dorsey explains that the program's "through line would
84 be this kind of mystical thread and how that orientation survives
85 the current climate."

86 In terms of the improvisational nature of the program,
87 Friesen thinks that it will be spontaneous.

88 "However, as I read some of the poems in advance, I
89 definitely have some musical ideas and vague kind of imagery
90 that will help guide me," he says.

91 Dorsey's work, Friesen comments, "has a tremendous
92 kind of relevancy and accessibility" with its contemporary
93 language and imagery.

94 "The interaction between us, I think, is probably closer to
95 jazz than anything else I can imagine," he says. "Not that the
96 music necessarily would be jazz, but this quality of spontaneity,
97 reacting to each other, bouncing off each other in that way."

98 And each performance will be different.

99 "Depending on Court's sense of rhythm and pacing and
100 the spaces that he allows for the music, it will change every
101 single time we do it, which is something that I find really
102 engaging," Friesen says.

103 About the timeliness of this work, Dorsey says that "in
104 hard times when things are stressful, resilience matters. And I
105 think these poems and this magnificent music are a sustaining
106 force."

107 He says they're "beautiful to the ear, powerful for the
108 heart," while not denying the here and now.

109 "Part of my work is in service to the human family
110 stumbling through the darkness," Dorsey says.

111 "And in these times when threats from [artificial
112 intelligence] compound an already-stressed and stressful
113 climate," Friesen adds, noting that he experiences "A.I. as kind of
114 a big conformity machine."

115 “It draws upon things that have happened already,” he
116 says. “What I resonate with in Court’s work is the feeling that it is
117 really an expression of a visionary, that there is a mystical kind of
118 vision, in the same way that you might associate some of the
119 work of William Blake or even Allen Ginsberg.”

120 Explaining the program’s title, Dorsey says, “I’ve called
121 this ‘Poems with Wings’ because when I read with Eugene
122 playing, I just feel like I take flight with it.”

123 Tickets for the Next Stage performance are \$15 in
124 advance, \$20 at the door. For more information, visit
125 courtdorsey.com/events.

126 **More poetry, more music**

127 At Yellow Barn, a brief residency culminates on Jan. 31
128 with a performance by Daniel Chong, violin; Jessica Bodner,
129 viola; and Daniel Anastasio, piano, collaborating on integration
130 of music and with the poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye.

131 Interwoven with Nye’s verse will be selections from
132 works by Eugene Ysaÿe, Dmitri Shostakovich, Maurice Ravel,
133 Tessa Lark, Luciano Berio, Charles Ives, and Johannes Brahms.

134 Anastasio, a soloist and chamber musician based in San
135 Antonio, Texas, is artistic director of several organizations,
136 including his ensemble, Agarita, and the San Antonio Chamber
137 Music Society.

138 “His programs,” a news release notes, “have included
139 collaborations with dancers, writers, museums, photographers,
140 glass-blowers, and more.”

141 In San Antonio, Anastasio met and first collaborated with
142 Naomi Shihab Nye, daughter of a Palestinian refugee and an
143 American of German and Swiss descent.

144 Having spent much of her adolescence in both Jerusalem
145 and San Antonio, where she studied at Trinity University, Nye has
146 received numerous honors and awards for her work, ranging from
147 the National Book Critics Circle’s Ivan Sandrof Award for Lifetime
148 Achievement to the Isabella Gardner Poetry Award and many

149 Pushcart Prizes. Among other honors, she's been a Guggenheim
150 Foundation fellow and Chancellor of the Academy of American
151 Poets.

152 Of the residency is, Anastasio notes that "if we come
153 prepared with our own parts and we have good ears, we should
154 be able to put it together within a day or two."

155 He and Nye, past collaborators, are "working beforehand
156 to organize the poetry," he says, "and how it will interweave with
157 the music."

158 Once they converge in Putney, the team with fellow
159 collaborators, Daniel Chong, founding first violinist of the
160 Grammy Award-winning Parker Quartet, and Jessica Bodner,
161 founding violist of that quartet, "can just play around."

162 "That process is going to be fun," said Anastasio. "All of
163 us will have opinions, and it'll be easy to make adjustments as
164 needed."

165 In preparation, Nye adds, "it's such a pleasure to be
166 listening to this music every day: thinking about the music,
167 thinking about poems and sort of immersing in a slow way before
168 we're all physically together."

169 He also finds it "interesting how intuitive it is, too,
170 because when I listen to a piece a few times I start thinking 'No,
171 no, it has to be that poem,' and I'm even writing a new poem or
172 two to connect with some of the music."

173 It's exciting for Nye when she finds herself listening to
174 the music and a poem "suddenly starts emerging. And because
175 Daniel and I have done other programs together, I've seen how it
176 works. It's really an evolution, how it comes together."

177 Anastasio stresses that for the process to work there must
178 be trust.

179 "From the first time we worked together, it was obvious
180 that she's incredibly trusting and that we trust each other," he
181 says.

182 Reaching out to artists in other disciplines, Anastasio
183 adds, especially coming from classical music, "is really important

184 [...] because we're so stuck in our own ways just by training.
185 We're trained to move our fingers. We're trained to interpret the
186 music at the deepest and highest levels, but not necessarily to
187 take risks involved in embracing other modes of expression."

188 For Anastasio, "it's just jump-started a profound passion"
189 — and that is "marrying the worlds of word and music."

190 He cites an example: "We programmed something by
191 Maurice Ravel, 'A Boat on the Ocean,' to one of her poems,
192 'Over the Weather.' And then that changes what was originally
193 about a boat riding on the ocean for Ravel and all the sounds and
194 words of that: It now becomes something that's high up in the
195 clouds."

196 Of the experience, he says, he gets to "throw all my
197 preconceptions of Ravel, all my classical training, out the
198 window in terms of interpretation, and I get to be curious about
199 what new emotional world this is generating between the
200 combination of them."

201 That's what's so exciting for Anastasio, who describes
202 himself as "a musician who's usually just stuck in, 'Oh, boy — I
203 better make sure I interpret this the way that it's supposed to be
204 interpreted.'"

205 Nye notes that the integration of words and music in the
206 poem will be a mix: a poem may precede or follow a piece — or
207 it may be inserted inside it.

208 With the music, she says, "the poems take on a new
209 expansiveness. This gives them a bigger life."

210 And, she adds, "it's unpredictable: what piece will go
211 with what poem."

212 That's because, Anastasio chimes in, "it comes
213 fundamentally from inside the feeling of the person. [...] It's the
214 tone, the character, the fact that music is rhetorical a lot of the
215 time. There's questioning, there's answering, there are statements"
216 — all too complex for the likes of A.I. to tease out.

217 Collaborator Bodner was a key force behind the
218 residency, Anastasio notes, adding that she is “personally a big
219 fan of Naomi.”

220 Of the event, Bodner says, “we couldn’t be more excited
221 and grateful to bring this project to a Yellow Barn residency,”
222 calling the opportunity “a true gift.”

223 Nye adds that she’s eager to be in Vermont again, having
224 years ago been featured on the Vermont State Poetry Tour.

225 “It was such a magnificent experience just meeting
226 different communities in Vermont and feeling the warmth of
227 Vermont to the arts,” she says. “I’ve never had even a slight
228 question about why anyone chooses to live in Vermont since that
229 tour because it was just so loving and so beautiful.”

230 Of course, audiences can choose as they wish, but
231 Stephan and Dorsey have no problem with folks creating a
232 double bill of sorts: “attend half of one event and all of the other”
233 or the other way around.

234 The two note that the “Poems with Wings” will end at
235 3:30 and the second set at Yellow Barn will begin around 3:45.

236 Admission to the Yellow Barn is free. More program
237 information is at yellowbarn.org. At the Big Barn following their
238 performance, the artists will lead an open conversation with the
239 audience.

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Bio/COATTAIL:

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